

ONE-PAGE STORIES

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A Cabin Story

FREDERICK MOE

AN S-SHAPED SHADOW SLITHERED its way up into the fireplace chimney and disappeared after a few moments. Fare thee well, I thought. The occupancy of the cabin had changed hands – the serpent moving out, and us humans moving in.

For the prior 18 months we had been blissfully house-sitting an abandoned, haunted Colonial on Deerfield Parade, N.H. One Saturday we arrived “home” from grocery shopping to find an unexpected property auction in progress. It was time to move on. Quickly!

Our next door neighbor Brian (who played guitar in a psychedelic band called Plan 9) knew a guy who owned a vacant cabin that he was willing to let us stay at for free at the end of an unmaintained class-six road in the middle of nowhere with no electricity, no running water, no phone, and no neighbors for a mile as the crow flies. Who could resist?

I was working 40 plus a week at the psychiatric hospital. NanSea was staying at home raising our three children. We bought battery-powered lamps, a battery-powered radio, and a cooler to keep ice in. We made as functional a kitchen as possible and comfy spaces for everyone to sleep. We chose the mosquito-infested loft as our nocturnal berth. We adapted to using the outhouse which we kept clean and relatively odor-free (thanks to 50 lb bags of lime which I hauled up the hillside). I spent summer evenings writing Doctor Who fan fiction and reading stories to our kids rocking in a rocking chair on the cabin porch. It felt idyllic.

Noises in the woods at three in the morning created anxiety. I startled awake one moonless night from hearing a loud high-pitched screech and a low guttural growl. “It’s probably an owl and a bear,” NanSea said. I got up, went outside and paced on the porch for a few minutes, peering through the trees. I rubbed my blurry eyes. Fireflies flitted between pine branches. A snap echoed at an unguessable distance. Was that a branch snapping that I heard? It could have been yards away or a few feet. Then: a vague rustle of leaves. Perhaps a racoon? Was that eyeshine in the clearing?

“Sasquatch?” I whispered, wishing I had brought a flashlight.

Blink.

Trapped in Our Own Back Yard

BY BILL BOYS

I PULLED THE GARAGE DOOR SHUT BEHIND ME as Ruth, our dog Foxy, and I returned from our morning walk. As always, I checked the lock button on the door was set before I stepped into the back yard – we’d been broken into once.

Walking to the back door of our house, Ruth said “I didn’t bring my keys this morning.” No problem. I always have mine with me because I need them to lock the front door as we leave on the morning walk. I reached into my pocket. They weren’t there! Oh no, I thought: I bet I left them hanging in the front door lock!

The two gates to our back yard have locks on them that require keys to open. Those two keys – you guessed it – are on the same key chain that’s hanging in our front door lock! Well, this is embarrassing. We were now trapped inside our own back yard!



Wait, I have my cell phone. Call our neighbor Ken, and ask him to run over to our house, get my keys out of the front door, come through to the back door and let us in. (Call went to voicemail. Nuts.) Well, call neighbor Cydney; she works at home during the pandemic, so she’ll probably be home. (Call went to voicemail. Nuts again.) I’ll try neighbor Vonnie; she’s our age and retired so she *has* to be home. Hooray, she answered. But she has to walk cautiously, so I can’t ask her to go all the way around to our front door – she lives just opposite our garage, though, so I’ll ask her if she can manage to walk across the street, go into my garage and open the door for me. A year ago this would have been an impossible request because our old garage overhead door could only be opened from the switch inside the garage or from controls in the cars – which are sitting inside the garage themselves. But – last year we got a new overhead garage door that can be controlled by an app on my cell phone. Luckily, I *had* installed the app *and* set it up!

I remotely opened the overhead door, Vonnie got in the garage, opened the door to the back yard, and released us. Memo to self: Don’t forget to hide a spare garage door key in our back yard. Remember: real soon now.

Mysterious Lights

BY MICHELLE KLOSTERMAN

THE CALICO RAN TO THE PATIO DOOR, arched her back and hissed.

“What’s going on Sassy?” Jen peered out between the vertical blinds. She couldn’t see anything in the night but blinding multicolored lights and shadows moving about. As she picked up the still hissing cat, the house’s lights flickered and music from the radio went to static then all went out leaving her in complete darkness.

Her heart raced and breathing became erratic as she held the cat close to her chest. “Shhh, I don’t know what’s going on either.” She made her way in the darkness to her bedroom and climbed into bed holding her cat close and pulling the linens over them. She clutched her cat as her mind raced. She struggled to remember if she’d locked her front door when she came home from work that morning. She was thankful that she kept most of her blinds closed due to working nights. She tried to listen for any strange sounds but her own heartbeat thumped fast and loud in her own ears. She attempted to call 911 but her phone wouldn’t work. It flashed no service. There was no point in trying to run for help since her property was surrounded by farmland. Sometime later she fell asleep.

When she woke in the morning none of her electronics were flashing to have their time reset. Sassy was at her food bowl begging for breakfast. She took care of Sassy’s needs. She peered out the kitchen window and everything seemed ok. She breathed a sigh of relief. She must have dreamed the whole thing. She started her chores. First, she collected eggs, but the hens’ egg production was way down from usual. Her vegetable garden needed attention. Her plants had gone crazy and had a larger harvest than expected. Next on the list was mowing her back yard. “I might as well get started,” she told Sassy and headed out to mow.

Taking the zero-turn mower down the short slope to her back yard she couldn’t believe what she saw in the lower section of her lawn. Intricate patterns were pressed into the area. **Oh my God.** She considered herself a sane person that relied on science, but now she was a believer. A believer in the subject that many were laughed at for believing. The whole ordeal had been real. **They** are real! We really aren’t alone in the Universe.

Fifty Years Later

BY CHUCK STRAUSS, NELSON COUNTY, VIRGINIA

MY DEAR SPOUSE JANE AND I met while in college at Catholic University in Washington, D.C. — actually got acquainted in the British Lit class during sophomore year; she says she fell in love of the back of my head!

Two more years pass and I was about ready to pop the question — but, I was away (ROTC Summer Camp) — and who knew what had happened in my absence. Fast forward to August 15 of that year. Somehow we got engaged — eventually setting a February 1 date for the wedding.

Now, Washington is a southern city, but they do have four seasons, and — you guessed it — it snowed on our big day! However, the wedding went off okay — the limo slipped off the road only once on the way to the reception.

The honeymoon was in Williamsburg. We arrived by train.

Of course it was dark, and it had just lightly snowed, so what we experienced was a glittery fairyland. We had reservations at the Market Square Tavern, a lovely building apart from the major hotel properties, with a daily rate of \$7.00.

The room was more than adequate for our needs and the experience was ineffable!

Fast forward fifty years: we decided to return to Williamsburg for our Golden Anniversary — so I contacted the reservations people, asking if by chance our 1958 room might be available, and I just happened to mention the rate we had, including sending a PDF of the room bill.



The room, although modernized — it now had a shower — was available. The rate, I was informed, would be the SAME as we had 50 years prior.

Inflation superseded by love!

The Foxhole

By VALDEN FARNHAM

MOVING ACROSS NORTHERN EUROPE, my battalion now faced Germany's last bastion of defense: the Rhine River, late March, 1945. Our unit would live in foxholes by day and prepare for our mission by the dark of night.

During preparation for the river crossing, squad buddy Ed Drozd and I dug a well-camouflaged, two-man foxhole. With only GI shovels, it was no easy task. We carved niches into the side where we stored our day's rations and love letters from home. If you carried a picture of your loved one, that too could be placed in the niche. The foxhole offered protection, but during the long hours of the day there was also time to write, meditate, read, and—in my case—hone my German-speaking skills and vocabulary. I was ever-thankful for the pocket English-German dictionary I kept in my fatigues.

With an opening to crawl in and out of the hole, the camouflage could be removed and replaced. However, that didn't keep the raindrops from trickling in. We ate meals — "C" and "K" rations — in the hole and hoped our natural bodily functions would hold off until nightfall. You couldn't smoke cigarettes, as the enemy could detect the smoke from across the river.

With a step to sit on, Ed and I had a deluxe foxhole, and we were equipped for the next few days. As members of a communication section, it was our assignment to place phone lines between the three company beachheads and the command post. Then word came: "Tonight is the night." When a special meal was offered and the chaplain appeared, you knew damn well they meant business.

At 0100 on March 24, 1945, the plan of attack was put into motion. An unbelievable barrage of fire shook the ground and lit the night sky. At 01:45, the assault boats started their motors and the first wave of the 30th Infantry Division made its way across the Rhine. From my post on the west side of the river, I watched as the boats landed on the east bank at 0200 and the last round of artillery was fired with precision.

After witnessing one of the largest artillery bombardments, I soon heard the motor of the first boat returning with prisoners I had been directed to guard.

When Hell Froze Over

BY KATHLEEN J. ZWANZIGER

MEMORIAL DAY WEEKEND 2020, weeks into the Coronavirus Pandemic: all states were least partially reopened, even as the death toll in the U.S. neared 100,000. There was no Indianapolis 500. Many of the campsites visited were in our own backyards. AAA had not issued an estimate of how many people would be traveling. Airline traffic was down 93 percent. In Columbus, Ohio, “Red, White, and Boom” had been canceled, as had the State Fair.

On a personal level, I no longer played a game of Scrabble every day. Instead I had worked puzzles, including one purchased in Tübingen, Germany, depicting a scene along the Neckar River. I continued plodding my way through *The Complete Works of O. Henry*; now a mere 200 pages remained. Some of his stories are very amusing (e.g., “The Ransom of Red Chief”) but some left me asking, “What??”

Most startling to me is that I had started cleaning files which I thought would happen only when “hell freezes over.” Don't get me wrong! Even though I have recycled several wastebaskets full of paper, while also accumulating a large stack of paper used on only one side (to be recycled in its own way), there was still a lot in my files. I did manage to toss the orthodontic records for my sons (more than 30 years old). And I was only partially through the second drawer! The process was a time-consuming one, as I looked through so many folders. I needed to carefully check and remove personal information (social security numbers, etc.), but I also “needed” to revisit many memories. The cards my sons sent me for Mother's Day and my birthday. The hand-drawn cards from my grandsons. Grade cards for my sons (and probably, when I get to “my” drawer, for me). Our year in Tübingen, where Eric won an art award and learned to love Greek olives, where Jeremy invented his own language and met classmate Jawed (from Afghanistan) with whom he traveled one summer and who visited us another summer.

The weeks of COVID-19 have been for me the time “hell froze over,” of memories revisited, and files (somewhat!) emptier. What remains is carefully labeled with “shred” or “check this.” My Memorial Day barbecue consisted of social security numbers and birthdates, burning in the grill.

Getting Older Is So Much Fun Physically

BY CARLA STEPHENSON

I TURNED THE HALF CENTURY MARK a couple of years ago and have decided to embrace my inner old person. I have thought long and hard about how getting older has become fun.

The most noticeable changes that comes to the fore are the physical. I found a pair of jeans from my high school days and realized that I have gone from thick hair and a thin waist to thin hair and a thick waist. Of course, I have a closet full of clothes that I am going to wear 'as soon as I lose some weight.' If nothing else, getting older keeps the garment workers in business.

On my last visit to the doctor the physician recommended that I get more exercise. I think the worn track in the carpet from the bedroom to the bathroom from the nightly visits indicates that I get plenty of exercise.

Memory burps have become more prevalent lately. I will be talking along and forget the specific word that I want, which is frustrating. I figure it is in the archives somewhere – it is the retrieval that is faulty. Actually, that is ok, too. If I remember something at 3 a.m. that I wanted to tell my friend since grade school, Emily, earlier in the day, I call her. It is ok, since she is awake, too.

I don't worry about misplacing things. If it's important, it will show up. Eventually. I hope. If it is not, it should probably have gone to the thrift store anyway. Personally, I think that the older you get the more gremlins God assigns to you.

Speaking of which, I have found that I do not need so many possessions. I determined that I could probably dispose of about 2/3 of what I own and function just fine. The unfortunate aspect is that about 2 days after I get rid of something, I find it is just the thing I need. So I keep everything.

There is an interesting trend nowadays for young people to get tattoos. It is not something that I would do, but I realized the other day that all I have plenty already. I guess I am old technology, because the scars are not in color, they are in pink and white. On the other hand, all of the scars on my body have been earned and have interesting stories. Just pick a body part and ask me!

Getting Old Is So Much Fun, Socially

BY CARLA STEPHENSON

THERE IS A SOCIAL INTERACTION ASPECT of the fun of getting older.

I am going from Queen of the Faux Pas to just plain eccentric. I was in Sears the other day to pay my bill. There was a new cashier and an older one who was showing the new one how to put the payment into the cash register. Apparently, it was quite a process and the new cashier was having some difficulty mastering the process. As I was standing at the register, I was looking around the floor and noticed there were no other customers. In my attempt to make conversation, I said, "You're a little slow tonight, aren't you?" Well, that didn't go over too well, let me tell you.

I am no longer under any pressure to date. This lack of pressure is wonderful, but the budget to the hardware store has taken a blow. There is something disheartening about showing up at the hardware store, screen door in hand with a body shaped outline in the screen and the hardware store clerk says, "Are you back with another one?" Besides, I was tired of scrubbing the skid marks out of the driveway.

The questions at church have gone from "When are you getting married?" to "When are you retiring?"

I also am getting to know a wonderful set of young people. The newspaper kid and lawn-mowing kid have been replaced by the doctor, the optometrist, and the dentist, whose combined ages don't add up to mine. When I was young, I was worried that my body wasn't thin enough, muscular enough, proportioned properly, etc. There was a lot of competition among the young girls for the young guys. Now, I don't care. I am in shape and dumpling is a shape. But, the eyelashes still work.

I can go to the hardware store or nursery and ask a fit young muscle bound 20 year old to carry the bag of soil, rocks, fertilizer to my car. All I have to do is look at him, flutter my eyelashes, plead age/bad knees/bad back, etc., and he heaves and ho's the stuff to my car. No competition and I get all of the attention. In the meantime, I get to watch a young muscle bound guy walk ahead of me all the while being paid a lot of deference. I just love it! Ok. It is for maybe for two minutes, but at my age, I have to get my attention where I can.

Getting Old Is So Much Fun – Games

BY CARLA STEPHENSON

THEY SAY AS YOU AGE, you regress to childhood. I have found that we play the same games we played as kids, but have a different version when we got old. The concept stays the same, but the context changed dramatically.

My friend, Emily, plays games when we are up at 2 a.m. The first one is Concentration. She grabs the obituaries and I grab the high school year book and we match them up. Then we sigh theatrically and say, “But, he was so cute!” or “She had such pretty clothes,” or “He was too young to die.”

Another game we play before we get on the phone is Walk the Plank. It is when you get up in the middle of the night and follow the wear track in the carpet from the bedroom to the bathroom. If done properly, neither of us has to turn the hall light on to see where we are going and it saves us from having to open our eyes to get there. If we opened our eyes, the brain would wake up and then there would be no getting back to sleep. We know by now that when the phone rings in the middle of the night, it is not a family emergency, it is either of us who opened our eyes on the way to the bathroom and can't get back to sleep.

We also have Where'd It Go? Where we know we had an item 'just a minute ago' and now can not find it. We blame the Gremlins

Then there is the Jiggle Game. Each of us stands in front of the mirror, jumps up and down once and times how long it takes the fat to stop jiggling. We count how many times we can do this before breaking down into hysterical laughter which signals the end of the game.

Then there is the Details Game. We start talking about someone and end up in a competition to recall the earliest detail/gossip of that persons' life. Sometimes, we recount stories of people we have known all of our lives. Some stories are of relatives and friends up to 3 generations ago. Of course, none of it may be true or it may be true for a totally different person, but after a while, all of the details blur and the people are dead anyway, so who cares?

As I said before, getting old is fun; you only have to consider new ways of thinking about it.

Your One-Page Story Could Have Been Here

BY YOU

Send us one
for a
future issue!

See p. 12
for how to.

Write for ONE-PAGE STORIES?

You don't have to be a member of NAPA to submit pieces, although members are definitely invited. (Here's an easy place to practice and present your short-short story writing efforts.)

HOW MANY WORDS? About 350 to 400 words. Less if you have a photo or graphic to go with your story.

WHAT KIND OF CONTENT? Original prose, fiction or non-fiction. First-person stories, anecdotes and memoirs would be especially welcome, but other general-interest genres would be considered as well, as long as they are your own original pieces.

CAN I GET SOME EXTRA COPIES FOR MYSELF? Certainly. Just let me know how many you would like. No charge.

WILL I GET FEEDBACK? I'll be happy to share with you any feedback I might get from others about your story.

And a NOTE TO READERS — I welcome comments on any of the stories so I can pass them on to the writers.

WHERE DO I SEND A SUBMISSION? To Bill Boys either by email at williamboys@att.net (preferred, to save retyping) or by postal mail to 184 Reinhard Ave., Columbus OH 43206-2635.

Tips on writing short, short stories

Short stories are challenging. But check the web — particularly YouTube has videos by various authors and coaches, often less than 15 minutes long, and they're free to watch. Your library would have books on the subject, too.

One formula that I found on YouTube ran this way —

Find your key emotion. The revelation, the heart of the matter, the core meaning — all the same thing when it comes to short story writing. ...

Start with a hook. ...

Write the story. ...

Write a strong ending. ...

Reread your story. ...

Edit yourself. ...

Ask others for editing help.